

Personal Reflections on the End of a Family Journey and the Beginning of a New One

WRITTEN BY: [ANDY WOODS](#) MARCH 28, 2015: BLOG: THE WORD ON POLITICS

At the end of this month my Father, Fred Woods, will turn 80. Consequently, he has opted to retire from his position as a California Court of Appeals Justice at the end of the month on his 80th birthday. Being a California jurist is a position that he has held for the last 27 years.¹ He was originally appointed to the CA trial court. Then about four years later he was elevated to the California Court of Appeal. He has enjoyed a prolific career on the bench. During his 22 years on the California Court of Appeal he has authored roughly 3100 judicial opinions. Many of his opinions remain influential in the California legal system up until the present day.

My father owes both his original appointment and elevation to then California Gov. George Deukmejian, who was one of the last conservative governors the state of California ever had. What people sometimes forget is that California at one time was considered a red state. Remember, in past presidential elections California was carried by Nixon, Reagan, and George Herbert Walker Bush (in 1988). It's not until more recent times that California has trended in the Democratic direction. Consequently, my father has spent his waning years on the court being a faithful conservative voice in a state that has largely moved in more and more of a progressive and bluish direction.

Last week, when we discovered that the court was having a retirement reception in his honor, our family traveled from Houston, TX to Los Angeles, CA so that we could attend. It was a moving experience for our entire family as we contemplated both God's blessings and faithfulness over these last several decades and the end of an era. Interestingly, at this event, many of the court staff as well as fellow justices and lawyers spoke on my father's behalf. The common thread or theme that seemed to weave its way through these various testimonies related to my father's consistent character, congeniality, and steadfastness. I could tell that some of the various speakers may not have agreed with my father on every single matter of law or policy. However, all expressed an appreciation and likability for him in terms of who he is and how he treated all people fairly.

I think this whole experience, as well as growing up in his household, has taught me at least three great truths. First, character still counts. At the end of an era character is what most people will remember about you. They may not remember your intellect or the specific views you held on different issues. Rather, what they recall is you and who you are as a human being. Sometimes in the heat of battle it's easy to want to win an argument. However, in this very process sometimes we end up losing the war because of the way we mistreated and alienated people along the way. It seems that today's landscape is filled with people who are often more bent on pursuing victory than they are in pursuing justice or discovering truth. However, my father was never that way. While he took solid positions on a host of issues, at the end of the day people still actually liked and respected him.

This is something that I have been personally convicted of over the course of the last several years. One of the verses that keeps coming to my mind recently is the command by the Apostle Paul to speak the truth in love ([Ephesians 4:15](#)). For me, speaking the truth is the easy part. Doing so in love is more difficult. What a difficult balance this is. We should never compromise the truth. But as we present

truth we must do so in a loving way. While I may have a lot of personal growing to do in this area, at least I have the wonderful example of my father to follow.

Second, I feel that we have bought into an overly simplistic and narrow definition of what Christian service means. Most people think that you need to become a pastor, missionary, elder, or deacon to really serve God. While these are all wonderful callings and vocations, serving God is something that is far more diverse and comprehensive. My father's life and career showed me that you can actually be a servant of God in a non-church related institution such as government. This shouldn't be surprising in light of the fact that the apostle Paul calls government agents "ministers of God" ([Romans 13:4](#); KJV). It doesn't take long to discover that many of our most revered Bible characters served God primarily within the institution of government. Examples include Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Daniel, Nehemiah, Esther, etc.... While some are called to serve God directly in the church and through full time evangelism, others are called to serve God in the fields of government, politics, law, education, entertainment, media, finance, medicine, etc...All of these vocations and callings should receive the same recognition and respect that are also given to pastors and missionaries.

One of the things I love about our church, Sugar Land Bible Church, is that many political activists have become either members or regular attendees. I'm glad that these individuals feel at home in our church. My hope and prayer is that our church can be used to equip them for the ministries that they have in bringing desperately needed salt and light to the American system of government. I see these political activists as fellow ministers and foot soldiers of the cross. While we may all serve God in different ways, we are all equally servants of God.

Third, elections have consequences. Many people have the mistaken idea that it really doesn't matter which party or candidate wins elections. In the case of my father's career, I can tell you that such a notion is completely false. Because George Deukmejian in the early 1980s won one of the closest gubernatorial elections in the history of American politics, Deukmejian's judicial policies continued long after he left office through my father, who was just one of the many judges the governor appointed. Because Deukmejian left office in 1989 and my father is now retiring in 2015, Deukmejian's policies continued on almost 30 years after he left office through one of his appointed judges. The point I'm trying to make is political appointments long out last the short career of a typical politician. Long after that politician is gone their policies will continue to survive through the appointments that they have made during their brief tenure in office. This is especially true with judges. This is why every election matters. This is why we as Christians should show up and vote in every election. It is also why we should carefully examine and scrutinize the political ideology of anyone running for office. This is especially true of those offices where vast appointment powers are granted to the victor, such as Presidents and Governors.



So congratulations Dad on a wonderful judicial career. Your family is very proud of you. Even your eight year old granddaughter Sarah at your retirement party remarked, "Wow, I did not know that Grand Pa was famous." I'm not sure what you will end up doing in your retirement years. However, whatever you set your heart and mind to I know it will bear great fruit. So congratulations on the end of a journey and the beginning of a new one. And thank you for all of the lessons that you taught me along the way. From, not only your eldest son, but also one of your biggest fans.

1. For Justice Fred Woods' profile, see <http://www.courts.ca.gov/2481.htm>. [[↵](#)]

CALIFORNIA COURTS

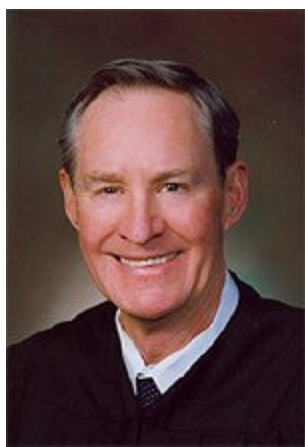
THE JUDICIAL BRANCH OF CALIFORNIA

Division Seven: JUSTICE FRED WOODS

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JUSTICE Fred Woods is a native of Texas, born on March 31, 1935, in Corpus Christi, Texas. He and his wife Penny reside in southern California. They have two adult sons. Nick is a high school English

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teacher and basketball coach. Andy is a lawyer and PhD candidate in theology. Andy and Anne are parents of his young granddaughter, Sarah.

Fred Woods graduated from Rice University in 1958 with a BA in Psychology and from Loyola Law School of Los Angeles in 1963. He was honorably discharged from the United States Naval Reserve in 1967 as a Lieutenant Commander.

Before appointment to the bench Justice Woods practiced law in Long Beach, California for 20 years.

Justice Woods was appointed to the Los Angeles County Superior Court by Governor George Deukmejian in 1984 and served in: Criminal Trials, Civil Trials, Law and Motion, and the Appellate Department of the superior court; and was a member of the Court Executive Committee. He was elevated to the Court of Appeal by Governor George Deukmejian in 1988. He has served on the Executive Committee, the Appellate Record Oversight Panel, as Acting Presiding Justice, the Appellate Delay Reduction Committee (Chair), and the Executive Legislative Action Network (ELAN) for the Second Appellate District (Chair). In May 2005, Woods served as Pro Temp Justice on the California Supreme Court.

He has authored numerous opinions while serving on the appellate court, including a number of noteworthy opinions, such as *Fisher v. San Pedro Peninsula Hospital* (1989) 214 Cal.App.3d 590, a landmark decision on environmental sexual harassment. He authored *Sanctions - Stepchild or Natural Heir to Trial and Appellate Court Delay Reduction?* (1990) Pepperdine Law Review, Volume 17, No. 3.

Justice Woods is active in the Joe Ball/Clarence Hunt American Inn of Court, Long Beach, California as a member of the founding committee, the executive committee, and as President. The American Inns of Court is dedicated to promoting civility, ethics, and legal skills and competence among bench and bar members.

Justice Woods has been active in the YMCA, Optimists Club, Rotary Club, Episcopal Church, California State Bar, the Long Beach Bar Association, other local bar associations, and the California Judges Association. His hobbies include sailing, physical fitness, and gardening.